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ABSTRACT

Approaches to intercultural communication competence display such diversity in method and perspective that the term "paradigm" can be used to describe them. There is evidence that a shift is occurring from "old" perspectives of intercultural communication in general and intercultural communication specifically, characterized by individualistic, persuasive, or rational conceptualizations, to "new" perspectives, characterized in terms of interaction, creation, and emergence. This crude way of categorizing these perspectives, as "old" and "new" paradigms, can allow for an examination of the conceptual issues that clearly impact our understanding of intercultural communication phenomena and the usefulness of that understanding. This is especially the case in an academic climate in which the meaning of terms such as culture and competence are ambiguous and shifting. (Contains 22 references and a table describing the new and old paradigms.) (Author/RS)

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Intercultural Communication Competence: Implications of "Old" and "New" Paradigms

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Abstract

Intercultural Communication Competence: Implications of "Old" and "New" Paradigms

Approaches to intercultural communication competence display such diversity in method and perspective that the term "paradigm" can be used to describe them. There is evidence that a shift is occurring from "old" perspectives of intercultural communication in general and intercultural communication specifically, characterized by individualistic, persuasive, or rational conceptualizations, to "new" perspectives, characterized in terms of interaction, creation, and emergence. This crude way of categorizing these perspectives, as "old" and "new" paradigms, can allow for an examination of the conceptual issues that clearly impact our understanding of intercultural communication phenomena and the usefulness of that understanding. This is especially the case in an academic climate in which the meaning of terms such as culture and competence are ambiguous and shifting.

Intercultural Communication Competence: Implications of "Old" and "New" Paradigms

Diverse conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence (ICC) can be critiqued in terms of two broad perspectives derived from arguments made by Casmir (1993) regarding intercultural communication in general, and Collier (1989) and Spitzberg (1989) regarding conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence in particular. Each of these scholars have examined conceptual issues fundamental to understanding both intercultural communication and the interconnected communication competencies. Although these scholars and others (see Ruben, 1989, and Hammer, 1989) approach these issues from different perspectives, clearly implied in their work is the interrelatedness of conceptualizations of intercultural communication and communication competence. Simply, how we understand intercultural communication is going to influence how we understand ICC and visa-versa. This chapter attempts to briefly outline two, in some sense distinct and disparate, general approaches to ICC using the backdrop of two underlying perspectives.

For lack of a better singular definitive word, the "traditional" perspective, characterized as individualistic, persuasive, or rational and the conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence best fitting this paradigm will be examined first. Alternative definitions of

ICC and the social interaction perspective understood in terms of interaction, creation, and emergence will follow (See Table 1). Granted, these paradigms are based on broad generalizations, and specific nuances of each will not be detailed.

Traditional Perspectives: The "Old" Paradigm

Casmir and Asuncion-Lande (1989) and Casmir (1993), in arguing for a paradigm shift in theorizing about intercultural and international communication, painted a picture of what the traditional perspective looks like. The roots of this paradigm are traced to Aristotle and present rhetorical models that are based "on concepts that result in domination, trust in the ability of some to persuade others to 'see things their way,' and the general assertion of power and control by one group over another" (Casmir, 1993, p. 407-408).

Of the many characteristics of this perspective or paradigm that Casmir (1993) pointed out, two are of particular importance in terms of our understanding of intercultural communication competence. First, much intercultural literature deals with "cultural" or cross-cultural differences rather than "inter"- cultural communication. One of the most basic assumptions within this paradigm is that the participants in an intercultural communication event represent differences in norms, beliefs, values, etc. Great efforts have been made to categorize societal cultural differences or variability in terms of high

and low context (see Hall, 1966), and individualistic or collectivistic orientations (see Hofstede, 1984). With these categorical schemes and others in mind, the tendency is to approach the study of intercultural communication situations with presupposed differences as primary concerns.

Second, much of the intercultural communication literature addresses only one person's perspective in the interaction, and thus misses the "interactional" dynamics. Perhaps necessarily so, much of the cultural adaptation literature is typically concerned with the "stranger's" adaptation and little attention is paid to the "host's" perspective (see Kim, 1988). As Casmir (1993) put it, "our past efforts could thus often be interpreted as having failed to address either "co"mmunication or "inter"cultural aspects (p. 415). The implications of these failings of the "old" paradigm for conceptualizations of ICC will be examined in the next section.

ICC and the "Old" Paradigm

The tendency to focus on differences in intercultural communication is echoed in several approaches to ICC. Dimensions of two overviews of ICC, that of Collier (1989), and Spitzberg (1989) can be transposed over Casmir (1993) and Casmir and Asuncion-Lande's (1989) depiction of old and new paradigms.

Collier described four approaches to ICC. The first two, cross-cultural attitude and behavioral skills

approaches, can be viewed as fitting into the old paradigm. The last two, ethnographic and cultural identity approaches fit the new paradigm discussed in the next section.

Cross-cultural attitude approaches conceptualize competence in terms of "understanding culturally specific information about the other culture, cultural general understanding and positive regard [for those differences]" (p. 292). This approach seems like a natural result of a focus on delineations of cultural variability. The emphasis in these approaches is the cognitive knowledge of the participants regarding broad cultural differences typically defined in terms of national affiliation or broad categorical differences (see Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984; and Wiseman, Hammer, and Nishida, 1989). Thus, these cognitive or attitudinal approaches fit into the "old" paradigm in that they utilize broad, categorical cultural differences assumed to be static and applicable to virtually any intercultural situation.

Collier (1989) also identified the behavioral skills approach in ICC studies (representing an old paradigm approach). Within this tradition, somewhat universal skills which can be learned and used in intercultural interactions are identified and studied as independent variables influencing the success or effectiveness of the interactions.

There are two main reasons the behavioral skills approach fits into what Casmir called the "old" paradigm. Interestingly, these skills (with few exceptions) are thought

applicable or useful in virtually any intercultural situation, in spite of the assumed cultural differences. And yet, the cross-cultural applicability of these skills is based on similar assumptions of static ways of interacting (whether intra- or interculturally). The second reason the behavioral skills approach helps illuminate the "old" paradigm is that even though these skills are conceptualized as skills used in interaction, they ultimately perform a non-interactional analysis.

Spitzberg (1989) depicted one fundamental approach to communication competence in terms of a distinction between ability and inference. The ability/inference distinction represents a familiar dichotomy in communication competence literature, that of defining competence as either a person's ability (to perform skills or demonstrate cultural knowledge) or as judgements made by participants in the interaction. Both the ability (similar to behavioral skills) and the inference approaches are typically non-interactional in nature and fail to allow for creative, non-static ways of interacting in the intercultural setting.

Several ICC review articles and specific research studies demonstrated the "old" paradigm at work. Hammer's (1989) review of ICC basically was a review of behavioral skills thought to be applicable cross-culturally. His general argument was that universal communication (competence) skills may exist, but that there are culture-

specific manifestations of those skills (e.g. display of respect, behavioral flexibility, descriptiveness, understanding, expressiveness, openness, listening, negotiation, social relaxation, interaction management, attentiveness, etc.). The question he did not ask is how scholars are conceptualizing "culture-specific." If culture is conceptualized in terms of existing categorical differences, then the specific ICC skills sought for and identified will be limited by those static conceptualizations. This kind of conceptualization is potentially misleading considering that the cultural characteristics outlined by scholars are rarely, if ever, similar to what the layperson who is actually engaged in intercultural communication has in mind. Schuetz put it this way, cultural patterns "have a different aspect for the sociologist and the man who acts and thinks within it" (1960, p. 99).

Hammer (1989) also addressed the ability-inference judgement by stating that "it is not the communication skill per se that contributes to the various adaptation and/ or effectiveness outcomes ... Rather, it is the individual interactants' judgements of self and other competence based upon the communication performances engaged..." (p. 251). Hammer attempted to escape from the imposed ability-inference dichotomy and described actual intercultural interaction. Perhaps realizing that existing skills and/ or judgment accounts of ICC falls short, Hammer concluded "intercultural

communication competence research must examine the behavioral dynamics that take place when people from different cultures interact with one another" (p. 255).

Olebe and Koester (1989) attempted to measure the universality and intercultural validity of similar behavioral skills. Briefly, university students representing high, moderate, or low intercultural contexts completed scales assessing their roommates communication competence. Their findings indicated that their was little difference in the structure of the scale assessments for the three groups, and thus the behavioral skills appear to be universal and applicable to intercultural situations. Since there was no identification of the specific cultures represented, degree of cultural similarity or dissimilarity, or observation of actual interaction, the results seem tentative at best.

Dinges and Lieberman (1989) argued many models of ICC have failed to consider situational and interaction variables. In an attempt to remedy this, they designed a study to "assess the communication competence of persons in specific situations and to measure the influence of situational factors on judgments of observers" (p. 372). Unfortunately, their experimental research design plummeted them into the same non-interactional abyss so many have succumbed to. Six Japanese-American and six Caucasian (static categories) were asked to imagine various job employment (interaction) situations and act in front of a

camera. Clearly, being alone is not interactional, and imagining a situation, and actually being in one, are two very different things. In an attempt at objectively identifying judgements (of participants?), 64 undergraduate students viewed the videotapes with general orientations to the "situation" recorded and completed scales assessing judgments of the recorded persons' thoughts, feelings, and overall response. Alas, this study merely paid lip service to the importance of the situation and actual interaction dynamics. ICC was not discovered in actual interaction, but determined in the presuppositions of the authors and their measurement tools.

Martin and Hammer (1989) performed a similar study in their attempt to develop an inventory of behavioral skills based on responses to imagined intra- and intercultural situations. Again, undergraduate students were asked to imagine themselves in dyadic interactions varying in terms of where (what country) the other person was supposedly from (clearly assuming broad cultural stereotypes are sufficient criteria for assessing behavioral skills appropriate for intercultural communication). This evidences a combination of ability (the hoped for behavior inventory) and inference (judgements of potential interlocutors). The only benefit the findings offer is a vague representation of stereotypes of ingroups and outgroups and the accompanying presupposed appropriate communication styles.

Redmond and Bunyi (1993) examined the relationship between ICC and the handling of stress among college students. Of importance to us here is how they conceptualized intercultural communication competence. ICC was defined in terms communication effectiveness, adaptation, social integration, language competence, knowledge of host culture, and social decentering (empathy). Cognitive or attitudinal measurements and behavioral abilities were thought to impact the amount of stress and the handling of stress.

Interestingly, measurements of the various concepts thought to give an indication of ICC (an interactional phenomena) were gathered in self-reports. So, these assessments of ICC were inference oriented, but not inferences about someone else's competence in specified situations. Rather, ICC (self perceptions of it) was used as a predictor of the amount and the handling of stress. Again, there is little offered in terms of understanding "inter"cultural "co"mmunication. We really cannot even assume that self perceptions of ICC are associated with stress, since a vast number of other "causes" of stress were not considered.

Alternative Perspectives: The "New" Paradigm

Casmir's (1993) model representing a paradigm shift in intercultural communication is perhaps better labeled prescriptive than descriptive. Casmir's third-culture

building model is an effort to break away from orientations characterized in terms of dominance/submission, non-interactional, and sender or receiver foci. Briefly, Casmir (1993) hoped to develop a model that "has as its primary function and basis the human communication process, that is a joint, cooperative, participatory, mutual building process" (p. 408).

Casmir and Asuncion-Lande's (1988) concern was with the creation of culture. So, culture was viewed in non-static, fluid terms:

> We must provide for the possibility of the creation of a third or new culture that does not merely use earlier component parts, but that can create new insights, new goals, new techniques, and new roles, precisely because diversity of experience requires something new without domination by any one of the partners contributing to the process. (p. 289).

Although Casmir and Asuncion-Lande did not develop a clear definition of ICC based on their "new" perspective, they did offer some comments. In discussing the "type of person" engaging in this third-culture building, Casmir and Asuncion-Lande suggested that this person's "philosophical and psychological outlooks exceed the limits of his or her indigenous culture," and that they "possess certain attributes, such as cognitive flexibility, cultural sensitivity, relativism in cultural values and attitudes, empathetic understanding, and innovativeness" (p. 295).

These traits are undoubtedly good ones, beneficial to intercultural communication. What is needed is a more descriptive model that shares the same goal of reflecting actual creative processes of intercultural communicators. Indeed, Casmir and Asuncion-Lande (1988) admitted that a definition of ICC reflecting their model is needed.

ICC and the "New" Paradigm

Many theoretical approaches to intercultural communication share some of the characteristics of the third-culture paradigm (e.g. Coordinated Management of Meaning presented by Cronen, Chen, and Pearce, 1988; and Constructivism presented by Applegate and Sypher, 1988). One theory that addresses ICC directly and one that may represent a paradigm shift is Collier's (1989) Cultural Identity theory.

Collier (1989) positioned her Cultural Identity theory against traditional approaches to cultural and intercultural communication competence. According to Collier(1989), a "Western bias may be reflected in the teleological assumptions that humans have intentional goals and make choices in their behaviors to achieve those goals" (p. 294).

Her proposed framework emphasizes ethnic or cultural identity as it emerges in a particular conversational context. Like Casmir and Asuncion-Lande, Collier conceptualized culture as an emergent phenomena. Her theory allows for historically transmitted dimensions of a person's

culture, but views cultural identities as "intersubjectively defined by similarities in symbols and norms, which are posited to potentially change during the course of a conversation" (p. 295).

Cultural identities that emerge from the interaction are used by the interactants to "identify" themselves and others as either being different or similar in cultural terms. Competence then is "conduct which is appropriate and effective for the particular cultural identity being adopted at the time in the particular situation" (p. 296). ICC is not abstracted from actual communication, but conceptualized only in light of specific interactions, and in terms of "mutually competent behavior" that is "negotiated" by the interactants together (p. 297).

Conclusion

Collier's (1989) Cultural Identity theory has the power to integrate diverse conceptualizations of ICC. Abilities need only be reconceptualized as situational, contingent on the cultural identities that emerge. In this sense, there are no universal ways of being competent, rather, contextual dynamics provide the way, one only need to follow. The idea of inferences need not be discarded but understood in terms of emerging cultural identities and the accompanying negotiations of competent behavior.

Many intercultural scholars include the idea of a stranger (Simmel, 1950; Schuetz, 1960), which assumes that one person is in a foreign land (culture), and another person

(the native) in his or her homeland. Intercultural communication should not be just an examination of cultural backgrounds that can be either greatly or slightly divergent. Intercultural communication is at once a cross-cultural comparison (the people may compare differences in their minds or in conversation), and at the same time it is quite the opposite and magically much more-- a unification in the face of diversification. The "new" paradigm's reconceptualization of culture demands that the enduring dimensions of culture be checked or balanced by the fluid, emerging nature of culture.

Hopefully the evolution of the "new" paradigm will usher in further understandings of the nature of communication in general and intercultural communication in particular.

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Table 1

Scholar	Term(s) fitting non-interactive paradigm	Term(s) fitting interactive paradigm
Casmir	Old Rhetoric, power	New Third-culture
Collier	Cross-cultural Attitude, Behavioral Skills	Ethnographic, Cultural Identity
Spitzberg	Ability, Inference	